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AUTHOR Baldwin, Roger G.; Chronister, Jay L.
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ABSTRACT

Non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty represent a significant and growing element of the American academic profession. In the fall of 1992 there were 110,227 full-time faculty working in non-tenure eligible positions. Data from the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF-93) illustrate where and in what program areas NTT faculty work, and show that women and minorities are more heavily represented among NTT faculty than among full-time tenured and tenure-track professors. NTT faculty generally are in the early stages and lower ranks of an academic career. Many do not have access to the full array of support and professional development opportunities, particularly support for improvement of teaching and research skills and for participation in professional association activities, and are ineligible for sabbaticals and retraining funds. NSOPF-93 data reveal that most NTT faculty are reasonably satisfied with their immediate jobs, although salaries, job security, and opportunities for advancement are sources of job-related dissatisfaction. Many claim they are likely to take a different job, in or out of higher education, within 3 years. The resultant staffing instability on some campuses and the potential loss to higher education of talented individuals should be issues of concern for higher education leaders and public policy makers. (MAH)

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Update

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Update

Full-Time Non-Tenure-Track Faculty

Introduction

In recent years, non-tenure-track (NTT) faculty appointments have become increasingly common on college and university campuses. Institutions believe that hiring faculty on a temporary, rather than a permanent, basis gives them more flexibility to respond to changing enrollment patterns and rapid developments in emerging subject areas. Non-tenure-track appointments also impact on the financial well-being of institutions by limiting salary and compensation commitments to a fixed contractual period, rather than to an entire academic career.

Nearly 80 percent of American higher education institutions now employ some faculty on temporary, non-tenure-track contracts. Approximately 20 percent of the full-time faculty in United States colleges and universities work in non-tenure-track positions, with nearly 14 percent of those faculty at tenure-granting institutions. Available data suggest that the employment of faculty off the tenure-track is a growing higher education phenomenon that should be monitored carefully. This trend has the potential to transform academic careers, the culture of higher education institutions, and, ultimately, the teaching and learning process.

This report employs data from the 1993 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (NSOPF-93). From this national data set, we retrieved information on full-time faculty in non-tenure-track positions at institutions with tenure systems and those at institutions that do not have a tenure granting policy.

Who Are the NTT Faculty?

In the fall of 1992 there were 110,227 full-time faculty working in non-tenure eligible positions. The majority of NTT faculty were male (54.3 percent). The data reveal, however, that women were more heavily represented among full-time NTT faculty (45.7 percent) than among the full-time faculty in general (33.0 percent).

Most NTT faculty (52.4 percent) were between 30 and 44 years of age, a period when many academics are busy establishing and advancing their professional careers. More than one quarter of the NTT faculty (28 percent) were 45-54 years of age. Less than 15 percent (14.4 percent) were age 55 or above.

The vast majority of NTT faculty were white (82.8 percent). Asians (7.6 percent) and African Americans (6.7 percent) represented the two largest minority groups among NTT faculty. Minority faculty had a slightly larger representation among full-time NTT faculty (17.2 percent) than among the full-time faculty in general (14.0 percent).

Many NTT faculty lacked a terminal degree in their field. Only 30 percent had the Ph.D., of whom 64 percent were male and 36 percent female. The Master's degree (42.8 percent) or a first professional degree (16.9 percent) was the highest degree of many NTT faculty.

Where Do They Work? What Do They Do?

All types of higher education institutions employ NTT faculty (Figure 1). The heaviest concentration of full-time NTT faculty was in research universities (39.5 percent). Substantial proportions of NTT professors were employed in doctoral granting (18.5 percent), comprehensive institutions (16.9 percent), and community colleges (12.3 percent). Only 7.8 percent were working at private liberal arts colleges.

Among full-time NTT faculty, the most commonly represented discipline areas (Figure 2) were the health sciences (28 percent), natural sciences (15.7 percent), and humanities (12.5 percent). Fields with the smallest representation among NTT faculty included agriculture/home economics (1.5 percent) and engineering (2.4 percent).

Slightly over 83 percent of the NTT faculty had instructional duties related to credit and non-credit courses. Data on credit-bearing courses demonstrate that these faculty, in general, support mainstream credit-bearing educational programs. The vast majority of the NTT faculty with instructional responsibilities indicated that they taught academic credit courses (90.7 percent). Fewer than one in ten (9.3 percent) stated that they taught only non-credit courses.

Limited data are available on how much NTT faculty teach. For the fall 1992 semester, 53.8 percent taught between one and five courses. A small proportion of NTT faculty (10.4 percent) taught six or more courses per term. Surprisingly, 35.8 percent of NTT faculty stated they taught no classes during the 1992 Fall term. This suggests that many NTT faculty may be involved in research or service/outreach activities in lieu of classroom teaching.

Employment Conditions

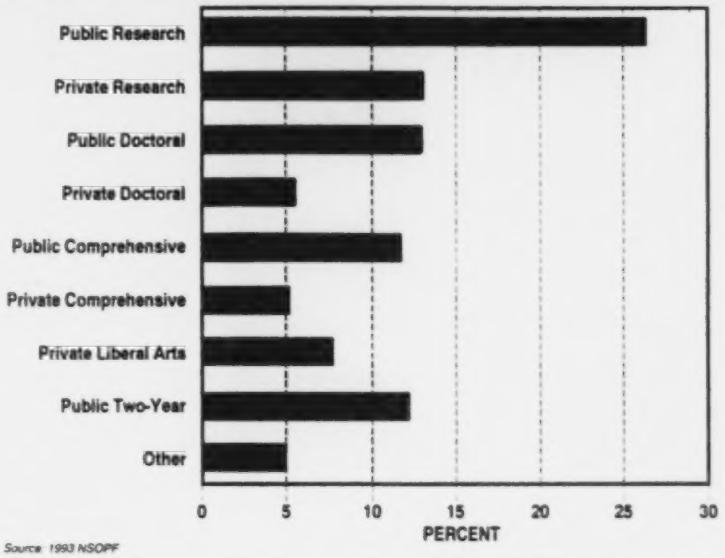
According to NSOPF-93, 68 percent of NTT faculty were working at institutions with tenure policies. The remaining 32 percent worked at institutions that do not award tenure.

The majority (50.8 percent) reported that they had a one year employment contract. Approximately 15 percent had a contract for one academic term. Nearly one third had contracts either for a limited number of years (14.9 percent) or for an unspecified duration (16.7 percent).

Most NTT faculty are ranked as instructors (28 percent) or assistant professors (25.4 percent). Another 10 percent are classified as lecturers. Only 14.7 percent have achieved the rank of associate or

Figure 1

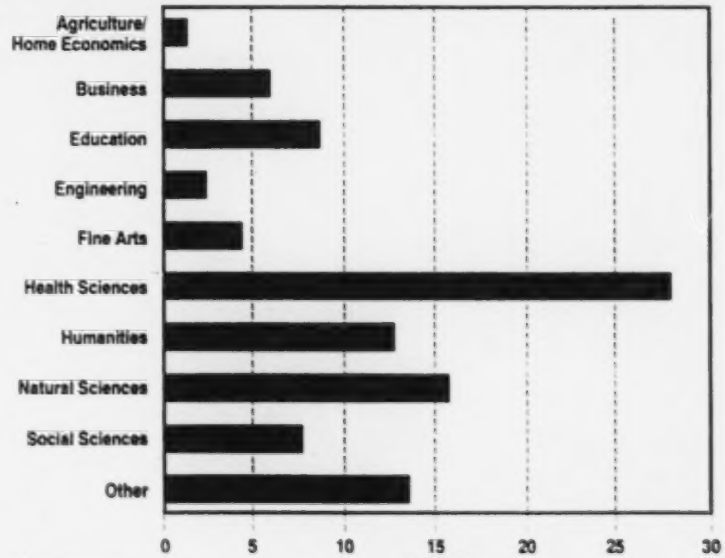
WHERE DO NTT FACULTY WORK?



Source: 1993 NSOPF

Figure 2

PROGRAM AREAS OF NTT FACULTY



Source: 1993 NSOPF

full professor. This may be evidence that many NTT professors are in the early stages of an academic career, or that they are at this rank/stage primarily because they have not had the opportunity to advance in rank or received the support needed to move their careers forward.

Support for the professional development of non-tenure-track faculty is varied. Most NTT faculty indicated that they received funding for tuition remission (55.8 percent), professional travel (71.8 percent), training to improve teaching or research skills (50.2 percent), and nearly half (46.1 percent) received funds to join professional associations or pay registration fees. On the other hand, fewer than one third (31.7 percent) were eligible for paid sabbatical leaves, and an even smaller percentage (15.8 percent) were eligible for funds to support retraining in higher demand academic fields.

Information on the satisfaction of non-tenure-track faculty is most enlightening when examined from two perspectives (Figure 3): 1) factors related to job satisfaction and 2) factors related to overall career satisfaction. The majority (64.7 percent) indicated they were either somewhat or very satisfied with their authority to make decisions about the content and methods in the courses they teach. Similarly, most (54 percent) were somewhat or very satisfied with their authority to decide what courses they teach and with their authority to make decisions about non-instructional aspects of their jobs. Most NTT faculty (53.3 percent) also expressed some level of satisfaction with the time available for working with their students. It is interesting to note (Figure 3) the approximately 30 percent non-response to each of these four academic role items.

The vast majority (75.8 percent), reported some degree of satisfaction with their freedom to do outside consulting. Overall workload does not appear to be a concern for most NTT faculty either. Nearly three in four (72.5 percent) reported satisfaction with their workload. This fact should not mask the workload dissatisfaction expressed by more than one quarter (27.6 percent) of the NTT faculty sampled.

Factors related to the long term career prospects of NTT faculty generated a higher level of dissatisfaction than did various aspects of the jobs themselves. Nearly half (48.5 percent) stated they were somewhat or very dissatisfied with the time available to keep current in their academic fields. Forty-three percent were dissatisfied with their job security. Perhaps most significant is the amount of dissatisfaction with opportunities for professional advancement in rank at their institution of employment. The majority of the NTT faculty sampled (53.6 percent) reported they were dissatisfied. Clearly, being off the tenure track raises concerns among many NTT faculty about their future career course.

The largest level of dissatisfaction

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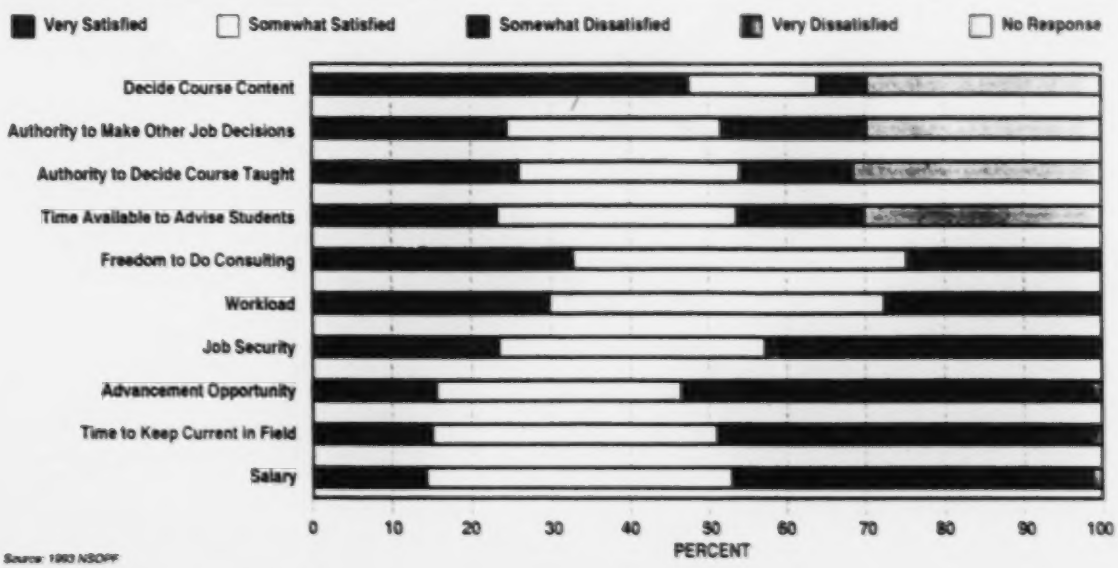
Figure 3

SATISFACTION WITH WORK CONDITIONS



Source: 1993 NSOPF

among NTT faculty concerned their salaries. Although most (52.8 percent) were somewhat or very satisfied with their salaries, nearly half (47.1 percent) were not satisfied. Many NTT faculty are hired at low faculty ranks which usually command very modest salaries.

Future Career Prospects

Concern about the future apparently encourages many NTT faculty to explore career alternatives both in and out of higher education. A large proportion indicated that within the next three years it was somewhat or very likely that they would leave their current position for a full-time job at a different postsecondary institution (53.3 percent) or outside of postsecondary education (43.2 percent). About one in five faculty also reported that it was likely they would leave their current job for a part-time position in another college or university (20.7 percent) or outside of postsecondary education (18.7 percent). This transient pattern seems to reflect a search for career stability and growth, not withdrawal from paid employment. Only 13.5 percent indicated they were likely to retire from the labor force within the next three years.

Summary and Conclusion

Non-tenure-track faculty represent a significant and growing element of the American academic profession.

The NSOPF-93 data show that women and minorities are more heavily represented among NTT faculty than among full-time tenured and tenure-track professors. Leaders of higher education should monitor this situation to be certain that under-represented groups are not being denied full access to academic careers through placement in an alternative (and potentially less desirable) career track.

NTT faculty generally fall in the early stages and lower ranks of the academic career. Like all early career faculty, they need the support and professional development opportunities required to build a succesful professional life. The data demonstrate, however, that many NTT faculty do not have access to the full array of these opportunities. Of particular concern is the limited support available for improvement of teaching and research skills and for participation in professional association activities. Combined with the absence of eligibility for sabbaticals and retraining funds, many NTT faculty appear disadvantaged compared with their tenure-track colleagues.

The principal concerns of NTT faculty seem to be long term rather than short term. The NSOPF-93 data reveal that most NTT faculty are reasonably satisfied with their immediate jobs, although salaries were a source of job-related dissatisfaction for many. A substantial proportion of NTT faculty were also dissatisfied with their job security and their opportunities for advancement. Many NTT professors reported that they were likely to take a different job (in or out of higher education) within three years. This situation may foster staffing instability on some campuses and, occasionally, the permanent loss of talented individuals to higher education.

Higher education leaders and public policy makers should attend to the issues raised in this report. Evidence shows that NTT faculty are an increasingly important component of the teaching force of many colleges and universities.

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Office of Higher Education
1201 Sixteenth Street N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036
202-822-7100

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Higher Education Staff
Christine Maitland
Rachel Hendrickson
Dely Pena

This issue written by
Roger G. Baldwin, College of William and Mary
and Jay L. Chronister, University of Virginia